

FIRE WATCH

Jeff Hutcheson



FIRE HOSE

On Wednesday morning, the Council Bluffs Fire

Department was operating at a working fire at 110 East Angle. The fire was called in during the early morning hours but because of the nature of the fire we were still operating at the beginning of rush hour. Due to the location of the fire and the fire apparatus, traffic flow was significantly impacted. Unfortunately, this cannot be avoided during these types of emergencies. Whenever we are operating at a fire or other emergency scene, we try hard not to impede traffic any more than is necessary. This is where the problems often begin. We all know it is inconvenient to have to change our routine, especially at the last minute, in traffic, on our way to work, the gym, school, wherever. It can change the entire day. This interruption in the daily routine happened to many people on Wednesday morning, in fact, to the point where several citations were issued for driving around barricades and for driving over fire hose. Why, you may ask, were these citations issued? There are several reasons. First, let's look at the act of running over a fire hose. What's the big deal? Fire hose is expensive. A section of fire hose costs approximately \$1.20 per foot per inch of diameter. For example, a 50' section of two-and-a-half-inch hose, which we use as both supply and attack hose, costs roughly \$180.00. A 100' section of 5-inch supply line costs approximately \$600.00. This hose is constructed to take the abuse of the fireground, but is not constructed to be run over by vehicles. Just the act of a car driving over the hose shortens its life considerably. Besides the cost aspect involved, there is also a safety issue. That fire hose, whether it is being used as a supply line or an attack line, is actually a lifeline of sorts. Very often, we have fire crews working inside of a structure, operating a hose to extinguish the fire. If the water flow through that hose is interrupted, the safety of those firefighters is compromised. Running over the hose can damage it to the point where it could burst, thereby stopping the water flow. In order to replace the broken hose, the hydrant may have to shut off. This takes time, often, time we don't have. Those are the two main reasons we are protective of our fire hose. After each use, every section of hose used is inspected, washed and hung to dry, thereby extending its life.

Back to the barricade issue. The Police Department responds to our emergency scenes to help control traffic, to help with interviews and provide any other assistance they can. One of the ways they help to control traffic, especially at a larger scene, is to place barricades to redirect the traffic pattern and to help protect our hose and our personnel. There is a lot of activity on the fireground during an operation and we assume that there will be no traffic through the area. If someone moves a barricade or drives around a fire apparatus, the results can be disastrous. In fact, under our municipal codes, it is illegal to even enter any block where a fire department vehicle is operating or to follow a responding fire apparatus closer than 300 feet.

Hopefully this explains what happened Wednesday morning and everyone has a better understanding of the situation.

RETIREMENTS

Recently the Fire Department experienced two more retirements, both attributed to job-related injuries. Firefighter/paramedics Dave Phillips and Todd Wright both left the fire service after barely beginning their careers. Phillips was hired on January 10, 2000 and was placed on pension November 18, 2003. Wright started with the Fire Department on January 29, 2001 and his pension was effective December 15, 2003. Please join me in wishing these two young men the best of luck in the future.

As long as we are talking about retirements, retired Fire Marshal Dan Branstetter was recently spotted sneaking out of the Fire Marshal's office with a piece of framed artwork tucked under his arm. When stopped, Branstetter claimed he was the rightful owner of said photograph and he was simply picking up his property. Actually, Dan and his wife Karen were back in town after spending a considerable time traveling and visiting friends and family. By the way, the photograph really WAS Dan's, he just forgot it hanging above the bookcase.

As always, I appreciate your comments, questions and criticisms. I can be reached at; Council Bluffs Fire Department, 200 South 4th Street, Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503, 712-328-4671 or e-mail at jhutcheson@cbfire.org.